

Abstract ID : 215

Title : DUGONGS (DUGONG DUGON) ALONG THE EASTERN GULF COAST OF THAILAND

Category : Conservation

Student : Not Applicable

Preferred Format : Either Oral or Poster Presentation

Abstract : In Thailand, dugongs have historically been seen regularly along both the Andaman and Gulf of Thailand coasts, but it has recently been believed that most dugongs were largely found confined to the Andaman coast. Nateekanjanalarp and Sudara (1994) reported that dugongs may still exist along the eastern coast of the Gulf of Thailand. This project was the first scientific research that attempted to assess the numbers of dugongs and the location of population groups along the eastern Gulf of Thailand. Based on previous interviews and stranding reports, we carried out aerial surveys, concentrating our efforts in Rayong, Chanthaburi, and Trat provinces. Two interview teams were formed that conducted 125 interviews with local villagers. From the aerial surveys in Rayong and Chanthaburi we saw a minimum of 3 dugongs and a maximum of 7, including 3 calf sightings. In Trat, we saw a minimum of 10 dugongs and a maximum of 36, including 7 sightings of calves, and groups of up to 15 Irrawaddy dolphins. Interview respondents, especially in Trat province, were generally unaware of the numbers of dugongs along the coast, but are aware and largely concerned with dugong and seagrass conservation. Fishers are aware that illegal trawling and push-netters that commonly trap dugongs are also a threat to their livelihood and the near-shore ecosystem. Ninety-one percent of the people we interviewed felt moderately to extremely positive about the establishment of protected areas to conserve dugongs, seagrass, and local fishing grounds. We recommend continuing this research, conducting further aerial surveys, more detailed seagrass surveys, and interviews. We also believe it important to include Cambodia in further research as the majority of animals found were close to the border. In Trat, we recommend immediate consideration of coastal management strategies to protect what we believe to be a hot-spot of coastal biodiversity.